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DECISION BOOSTS INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS THRU ALASKA AIRPORTS
Customs and Immigration Services Reinstate "Progressive Clearance"

After seven months of discussions with the U.S. Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Gov. Tony Knowles announced today the federal agencies have reinstated the "progressive clearance" of airline passengers transiting Alaska. The decision will increase the number of international passenger flights through Alaska airports by easing restrictions on passengers en route to other destinations.

"The Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport is a critical economic engine, not just for Anchorage but for the entire state," Knowles said. "Easing unnecessary and costly restrictions on transiting passengers will increase the number of international flights through Alaska and maintain our airports' positive presence in a healthy, diverse economy."

Progressive clearance allows passengers on international flights arriving in Alaska to clear the INS process at the first arrival point but postpone customs' baggage inspection until reaching the final destination. Prior to its reinstatement, passengers on international flights that stopped in Alaska for refueling had to disembark for INS screening, and all their baggage was unloaded and subjected to Customs inspection. This forced carriers to pay for ground handling services to unload bags twice and pay additional security fees to rescreen passengers when they reboarded in Anchorage.

Some international carriers using Alaska were so inconvenienced by this practice that they chose to bypass Alaska for Canadian ports of entry. This created a significant financial strain on the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport through loss of landing and fuel flowage fees. The airport's tenants, carriers, and local vendors also lost business, and the practice subjected international passengers transiting through Anchorage to a taxing and arduous experience.

Under the reinstated program, carriers will need to request progressive clearance approval from the INS for specific flights. With the return of progressive clearance, China Airlines will immediately reinstate daily flights from Taipei to New York. Cathay Pacific airlines has already reinstated 14 international passenger flights per week and the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport anticipates both Korean Air and Asiana will schedule additional flights through Anchorage.

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"The addition of so many flights at one airport in such a short period of time is tremendous," said Airport Director Morton V. Plumb Jr. "And this new directive benefits not only the Anchorage Airport but also Fairbanks International, with the summer Condor flights. We are proud to have accomplished such a feat that will provide so many benefits to the entire state."

"Restoration of progressive clearance would not have been possible without the assistance and perseverance of Sen. Ted Stevens, Congressman Don Young, and my Special Counsel John Katz in Washington, D.C.; and the determination and commitment of the management and marketing team of the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport," Knowles concluded. "They all deserve Alaskans' thanks."